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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 002041

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#) [ID](#) [EG](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: XINJIANG: PRC SCRAMBLES TO AVOID ANTI-ISLAM IMAGE
ABROAD AND KILL OIC DECLARATION

REF: JEDDAH 257

Classified By: Acting Political Section Chief Ben Moeling.
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) According to Beijing-based diplomats, PRC officials scrambled in the wake of the July 5 violence in Xinjiang to head off potential anti-Chinese reactions in the Muslim world by urging governments from majority-Muslim countries to refrain from official statements and control their media's portrayal of the riots. Beijing was gravely concerned that a declaration by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) condemning the PRC would cement negative feelings toward China among Muslims, and successfully lobbied Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others to delay OIC discussion on the declaration, contacts reported. The PRC rejected a counter-proposal by the OIC to abandon the declaration in exchange for allowing a visit by the OIC Secretary-General to Xinjiang, possibly because of the risk that China would be perceived as being forced to allow international observers to review its internal security situation. Contacts noted that support at the political level among Arab countries remained strong, but in Indonesia the government had to strike a more careful balance given the reaction of Islamists there to the Xinjiang violence. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization almost reflexively supported the Chinese government response.
End Summary.

PRC Scrambled to Counter Possible Anti-Muslim Image Abroad

12. (C) Egyptian Embassy Officer Haitham Safey El-Din (protect) told PolOff July 15 that the PRC leadership was aware of the danger to its reputation in the Islamic world from the onset of the violence. He reported that the Egyptian Ambassador was called into the MFA to receive Beijing's perspective on the violence on July 6, the day after the riots began. The Egyptian Ambassador was called in to the Foreign Ministry three times in the first few days, where MFA officials implored Egypt to refrain from commenting on the situation and to use its leadership role in the region to prevent the portrayal of China as anti-Muslim. The Egyptians reportedly insisted that China clarify its position and provide further details on the violence before committing to provide political support for the PRC. The MFA also urged Egypt to suppress media coverage in Egypt given the influential role Egyptian media plays in the broader Arab world.

13. (C) Indonesian Embassy Counselor Gudadi Bambang Sasongko (protect) recounted July 17 a similar story of frantic efforts by Beijing to persuade the Indonesian Ambassador in multiple meetings in the days following the violence to take

steps to minimize the perception that China's actions were anti-Muslim. He said that the MFA urged the Indonesian Ambassador to play a positive role in containing the response in other countries given Indonesia's influence as the largest Muslim country.

Negative Image Filling Information Vacuum in Middle East

14. (C) Egyptian Emboff Haitham predicted that the Xinjiang violence would have a profound impact on the impressions of China among ordinary citizens in the Islamic world, regardless of the outcome of a proposed declaration before the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) condemning China. While stressing that political support from Egypt and other countries in the region for China was very reliable, he said that the primary danger for China was in the long-term consequences for China's image among ordinary citizens in Muslim countries. He noted that many in the Middle East were only beginning to learn about and form opinions on China, and the image formed by the violence would cement an impression of China as anti-Muslim that would take a long time to change, particularly if reinforced by a message of condemnation from the OIC that goes beyond the organization's July 7 press release (reftel).

China Maneuvering to Kill OIC Declaration

15. (C) Haitham reported that China was gravely concerned about the effort by OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu to pass an OIC declaration condemning the Chinese

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government's response to the unrest in Xinjiang and its treatment of Muslim Uighurs. While suggesting support among OIC member states for such a declaration was limited, he said that Secretary-General Ihsanoglu pushed for a meeting to vote on the draft resolution for July 14. PRC officials reportedly responded with a series of strident demarches to member countries, with a special focus on Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to delay or scuttle the process. Haitham said Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi called Egyptian Foreign Minister Gheit to seek Egyptian assistance directly, and Egypt, in light of its economic ties to China as well as its own internal sectarian tensions, determined to put an end to the declaration. He suggested that Saudi support for the Chinese effort was also forthcoming. At Beijing's behest, interventions from Egypt, the KSA and others managed to delay a meeting on the issue until July 21.

OIC Counter-proposal Rejected by Beijing

16. (C) Haitham reported that OIC members had offered kill the proposal in exchange for permission for the OIC General Secretary to visit Xinjiang to assess the situation for himself. He noted, however, that Beijing indicated that it was unlikely to accept this counter-proposal, presumably, Haitham speculated, because of the comparison it would invite with other countries that have been forced to accept international observers to review their internal security situation, such as Sudan. Indonesian Embassy Counselor Sasongko reported that internal discussions among OIC member states remained active and on-going, but that it remained unclear which member state would sponsor the declaration.

PRC Has Support but OIC May Seek to Show Relevance

17. (C) Haitham opined that China would receive support from a majority of OIC member states, including Egypt, because of their own internal political concerns that resemble the problems in Xinjiang. He also pointed to the importance of economic ties for member states as well as the need for PRC support within the UN Security Council. Indonesian Embassy

Counselor Sasongko, however, said that Beijing also feared the OIC may seek to use a statement condemning China as an easy way to increase the organization's political profile and demonstrate its relevance to counter past criticism that the organization lacked a mandate.

OIC Resolution Would Be Disastrous

18. (C) Peking University Professor of Middle Eastern Studies Wu Bingbing (strictly protect) told PolOff that a formal declaration by the OIC would be disastrous for China's efforts to improve its image in the Islamic world given the organization's influence among Muslims. He noted that Beijing was monitoring closely the many calls for boycotts on Chinese goods and negative comments on Middle Eastern blogs but was unable to respond directly for fear of increasing anger toward China in the Muslim world. Heading off an OIC declaration or other formal statements from governments in majority-Muslim countries was urgent work for Beijing but was being pursued quietly, he noted.

Arab League Support for China Strong

19. (C) The MFA also reached out immediately after the violence to Arab League Ambassadors and the Head of the Arab League Mission to China with requests to refrain from official comment on the violence, according to Arab League Deputy Head of Mission Ahmed Mustafa Fahmy. He said that the Arab League Ambassadors were receptive to the request and were vocal in their opposition to terrorist activities, but also emphasized the importance of protecting "minority rights." He confirmed that China was making intensive efforts to kill the possible OIC declaration condemning the government's response, but stressed that League members were unlikely to support such a measure in the end given the complex nature of the violence and their own domestic political concerns. He opined that Arab League member states were also very unlikely to condemn China's actions on their own without the cover of a statement by the OIC or the Arab League.

Political Challenge for Multi-sectarian Countries

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110. (C) Indonesian Embassy Counselor Sasongko reported that ten days after the initial wave of violence in Xinjiang, Jakarta had yet to provide clear policy guidance. He blamed this on factors such as the elections in Indonesia and the travel schedules of key officials. He noted, however, that the issue was politically very difficult for Jakarta given the pressure from Islamist groups to condemn China's actions and the need for Jakarta to balance this with the importance of the China-Indonesia relationship. He also stressed the concern in Jakarta for repercussions given Indonesia's multi-sectarian society and the many Chinese that live there.

He said that his government was stressing that the violence in Xinjiang was driven by ethnic divides, not a religious issue or an expression of anti-government sentiment.

No Debate in SCO Over Show of Support

111. (C) Beijing-based Russian diplomat Denis Agafonov told PolOff July 16 that there had been "no debate" within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) over the SCO statement issued of support for China's response and that SCO members countries viewed the violence as a manifestation of the "three evils." (Note: the Chinese-defined "three evils" are religious extremism, separatism and terrorism. End note.) He echoed statements from other Beijing-based diplomats that China was clearly concerned about the international implications of this incident from the

beginning and had taken measures such as allowing journalists access to Xinjiang and the flurry of representations to foreign governments to prevent this incident from damaging China's international relations or image abroad.

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